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**File Code:** 2670  
**Date:** June 7, 2019

Jodi Bush  
Field Supervisor, Montana Ecological Services  
585 Shepard Way  
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Ms. Bush:

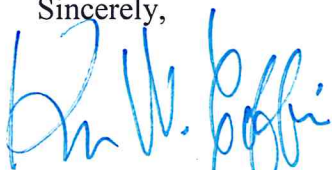
Enclosed is a biological assessment (BA) that analyzes effects to federally listed and proposed species from three minerals projects in the Stillwater Mining Complex on the Yellowstone and Beartooth Ranger Districts of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The need for federal action is the Forest Service responsibility to approve or require modifications to mining related Plan of Operations in accordance with federal mining and environmental laws. Two mining companies have proposed to use National Forest System lands in connection with operations authorized by the United States Mining laws (30 USC 21-54) which confer a statutory right to enter public lands to search for minerals. The following three projects are batched together in one BA due to the similarity of effects and the general area:

- Completion of the 13800 Blitz Ridge Ventilation Raises by the Stillwater Mining Company (SMC) to facilitate underground mine operations and development. Project activities will be temporary and require approximately one month of work including reclamation of disturbed areas between July 15 and October 1 of 2019. Once completed, these vent raises will remain part of the SMC mining operations for approximately 50 years;
- Group Ten Metals Stillwater West Surface Exploration Drilling Plan of Operations for Mineral Exploration Phase 1 for platinum group metals and other minerals. Group Ten Metals will explore its mining claims for platinum group metals and other minerals at ten (10) sites. Exploration drilling involves daily helicopter flights to transport drill rigs, equipment, and personnel, operation of drill sites 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including night lighting, helicopter laydown areas, water drafting sites, and road and overland travel by heavy equipment to transport equipment, water, fuel, and personnel. This is a temporary project proposed for implementation including reclamation of disturbed areas between July 15 and October 1 in 2019; and
- Group Ten Metals Stillwater West Surface Exploration Drilling Plan of Operations for Mineral Exploration Phase 2. This project will occur in the same area as Phase 1 but will include up to 35 drill sites. Associated activities described for Phase 1 will occur during Phase 2. Phase 2 is a temporary project proposed for implementation including reclamation of disturbed areas between July 15 and October 1, 2020-2025.



The Forest Service has determined that project activities *may affect but will not jeopardize the continued existence of the distinct population segment of the North American wolverine; may affect but will not adversely affect* the threatened Canada lynx or Canada lynx critical habitat; and *may affect and will likely adversely affect* the threatened grizzly bear due to the use of helicopters for project implementation. We are requesting a biological opinion with these determinations. If you have any questions about this BA, please contact Julie York at 406-848-7375 or Josh Hemenway at 406-587-6739.

Sincerely,



KEN W. COFFIN  
District Ranger

Enclosure

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cc: Alex Sienkiewicz, Scott Barndt, Josh Hemenway